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Let's have no two ways about it.
Jeanie really could be a twat.'

El leaned over the lectern and looked the front row of mourners straight in the eyes. She had one elbow on the celebrant's notes, and for all the world looked like she was ordering a pint of Bishop's Finger down at her local in Dalston.

'Oh no, it's the ex wife, I can see some of you thinking. How'd she get up there?'

She chuckled.

The celebrant suddenly took on a very bird-like stance, her gaze

flitting from El's biceps, tattooed with pitchforks and spades, to the family sitting on the front row.

'Look, we all know how things ended, for us all.' El continued. 'So when Ray and Pauline asked me to say a few words at the funeral, I thought, can't be sweeping that under the carpet, can I?'

On seeing a small, stoic nod from Pauline, the celebrant visibly relaxed.

'She'd been gone for a long time, before she went,' said El.

'Something happened to the woman I married. But today, I wanna remember the Jeanie I first

went for a coffee with, ten years back. Summer solstice twenty-fifteen. We got chatting over Motörhead, true crime, and the absolute nob of a client we were working for - I was doing the garden, she was doing the house. She liked my jokes about big bushes; I clocked that she got the serious behind the funny. One thing led to another, and Bob's your uncle, we moved in together.

'You'll all know Jeanie for her creativity, but it was something else to see it up close. She could knock up those perfect miniatures just from a couple o' photos people would send her - every angle bang

on, like she had Pythagoras himself whispering in her ear.'

El touched her necklace, a small replica of The Glory pub, its golden stage curtain visible in the tiny window - another favourite haunt in their early days.

'She never gave up who she was. There was me, chasing the cash, doing up gardens for the Rolling Stone down the road, and there she was - day job, Etsy, socials, workshops - all that, and still loving the bones off me.

'She knew London better than the pigeons do. A night owl, a grafter, a proper artist. She made tiny things

but had big dreams. She never became the version of herself she imagined - but she was already more than I ever needed.'

El's voice broke.

'Where'd you go, Jeanie?'

Jeanie narrowed her eyes at the woman standing in front of her in the full-length mirror. She was in her mid-thirties but she had set lines on the bridge of her nose whenever she frowned (often-ish), and spider veins on her nose from one too many nights at The Glory. She'd bricked together a bit-part career in examining and creating

very detailed miniatures, but she couldn't ignore the miniature but emerging details of her own ageing. Hair still the colour of embers, but flatter than it was. After a late night, eyes underlined in ashen mauve. And more, and more little changes, every day.

She rubbed the shadows under her eyes. Thank god for filters. If my socials took off, she thought, maybe I wouldn't have to do the late nights. What if I only had to worry about *one* job, instead of four?

As this thought pushed its way to the front of her mind, saw the

image in the mirror become blurry.
She reached out her hand to touch
its surface, steady herself -

And her hand went straight
through.

It disappeared into the surface of
the mirror.

She pulled it back in horror,
examining it, half expecting her
hand to be returned in ribbons, or
gone, or shrunk... but there it was,
just the same as when it went in.

The other side hadn't *felt* any
different.

Cautiously, she stepped closer to
the mirror. She thought about her

plans for the afternoon, which began with fulfilling yet another Eiffel Tower order from Etsy.

She held her breath, and jumped, cat-like, through the mirror's frame.

On the other side, she landed behind a large hebe bush, looking out onto an emerald expanse. A large lawn stretched out on one side of her, and on the other a house made largely of glass, framed by cirrus clouds and a cerulean sky. It was one of those houses Jeanie had only ever seen on TV, on the kind of show where the families building it can, at the

last minute, locate an extra hundred grand to cover all those *unforeseen costs*.

On the other side of the bush, Jeanie could see someone in the driveway, standing behind the open car boot, apparently filming themselves.

Jeanie's height, Jeanie's build.

Hair the colour of embers.

'Okay, everyone.' Other Jeanie was holding up her phone, addressing her followers. It's Saturday *Tackquisition*, so let's see what the flea markets of Kent had in store today. I got *so* many things you all told me not to...

Jeanie cringed: it was just like when you hear your own voice on tape. Except it wasn't on tape, it was real life. In this universe, the one beyond the mirror, this was *her real life*.

She felt a kind of ecstatic panic begin to rise in her, but bit her lip. This was not a moment to let herself be overwhelmed. She'd always been *in her head*, spending time in other, imaginary places - what ifs, thought experiments, speculative fictions. In equal measure entertained, scared, protected and encouraged by these other worlds. But here she was. Actually in one. There were so

many questions she needed to ask herself.

'Hey!' she yelled, at the top of her voice, breaking the cover of the bush and running towards Rich-Jeanie. RJ.

No response.

'HEY!' she shouted. 'JEANIE!'

No response.

RJ resumed the filming without seeming to notice Jeanie at all. She banged on the car - RJ continued, unperturbed. She tried to make a little scratch: maybe she could write something? But her key made no mark.

'Shit,' said Jeanie, as her plans to ask Other Her for the secret to her success went up in smoke.

As RJ continued filming her *Tackquisition*, Jeanie took curious steps towards the house. It was summer, and the back door was open. She slipped inside.

It was everything she'd ever wished for: a hot tub under the trees, her own studio, filled with the latest Modex equipment, changeable wall displays which you could programme to every mood, secret passageways, and an entire attic, windows looking out into an expanse of sky, filled from corner

to corner with a model town populated with places whose spaces filled her head and her heart.

She picked up an exquisite rendering of the Hackney Empire theatre, which fit in her palm, and whose inside was as perfect as its outside. *This is the best thing I've ever made*, she thought. In her world, it was under its gilded gold florals and sweeping balcony that El had first told Jeanie she 'bloody loved' her.

El.

When she entered this world, she'd only thought of the way forward.

Not back. Maybe, like Alice, she'd wake from a dream, but this world felt as real as reality gets. She had to find the way back.

Her steps became increasingly urgent as she ran to the back door, bursting through, her eyes racing across the garden, breath quickening. Nothing. There was nothing there. She was stuck.

She began to pace, hyperventilate - and then - a distortion - almost imperceptible, but there.

She ran, jumped into the haze, and after she'd crossed back into her bedroom, looked behind her. The mirror's surface glared, reflecting

the unchanged bedroom sharply and clearly.

She checked her phone. Half an hour. Exactly the same amount of time had passed in that world as this.

El opened the bedroom door, eyebrow raised.

‘I heard a noise - love, I’ve been looking for you. Where’d you go?’

‘I went -’

She paused. A split second decision.. ‘I went for a walk.’

She’d tell her the truth when she figured out how.

The mirror didn't just lead to that one world, or that one Jeanie. Day after day after day of experimentation taught her that all it took was a thought, a moment of wanting, to unscroll an entire universe. She'd think of a place, a time, a life she'd never lived but might have, and it would be there, waiting for her. She learned to craft her thoughts, to manifest them with colour and texture, and the mirror, it seemed, was always watching.

She went, again and again, to Jeanies who did things she'd always dreamed of. One owned a bar in Vietnam, an unforgettable

and nocturnal woman, handing bright and burning glasses to people having the times of their lives. One was a competitive cyclist who trained in the Alps, her legs a blur of muscle - unbeaten, unbroken. One was a war correspondent, tirelessly pulling stories from torn down cities, amplifying the voices of those in the rubble. One was an upstart of the Berlin arts scene, a riot of paint and new ideas. Jeanie wove through urban landscapes and gloried in great expanses of nature. Time, in these worlds, stayed its course. There were no past or future lives, and minutes moved at

the same pace. So she bought an analogue watch - a tag to encircle her and remind her when she had to go. *Hurry up please, it's time.*

“Just half an hour in the mirror” became “just until the end of this conversation”, became “just until lunchtime”, became, “just when El will notice”. She started to miss orders. When El asked her how her day had been, her mind was full but her mouth was empty. Their conversations went from intricacies and intimacies, to broad-brush banalities. ‘Same old, same old,’ she’d say.

What with El on site, and her freelance, the secret was easy to keep. The more worlds she saw, the more she felt them crowding, widening the space between her and El, making the telling of it - if she ever could - feel further and further out of reach.

She'd been slipping between worlds for two years when one evening, laying in bed, she traced the outline of the roots tattooed on El's forearms with her fingertip. In their eight years together, the lines had blurred. 'You ever think about

getting these redone?’ she asked, idly.

El turned her over, and in that way only she could, anchored Jeanie’s gaze to her own.

‘I know something’s going on, you know.’

Jeanie’s stomach jolted: a missed calculation. She’d never been caught. She thought she’d kept it all contained.

‘You’ve had less and less materials coming into the house. Sana said she never sees you down the workshop. What aren’t you telling me?’

Jeanie suddenly felt the loss of those early moments; the truths she'd never let become words; the confessions which would have kept her from this moment - when she knew she was going to lie.

'I'm just tired of it,' she said, not meeting El's eyes. 'I'm sorry. I should have talked to you about it. I want to do what speaks to me, as an artist.'

It wasn't that El wouldn't believe her - it was something quieter, more certain. El would've told her to stop. And she couldn't stop.

El pulled her close. 'Do whatever you need to, love. I've got us.'

The first time she went overnight, she told El she was going to Manchester for a conference.

She was starting to have favourite Jeanies to follow - lives that she'd tune in to with more investment than her own. War Correspondent-Jeanie, CJ, was one of the best.

CJ had hard eyes, the lines at their corners like history's own annotations, deepening with every atrocity she refused to shy away from. She was at the top of her game. Jeanie watched her deliver to camera as fire cracked the sky behind her. She watched her pull

truths from people, on-air, off-air, tactfully uncovering misinformation. She saw her fuse technical knowledge with deep empathy, in three words.

CJ had been nominated for a Peabody award. The night Jeanie was in “Manchester”, she stood before the stage, eyes gleaming, watching CJ’s acceptance speech for her groundbreaking reporting from her world’s Iranian Civil War.

Maybe she could stay for a bit longer - just stand a while in the warm words of others. To hear with her own ears the appreciation of a lifetime’s work.

2am, looking into the mirror - already blurry. Once, 2am had been her favourite time, the stillness a promise of tomorrow.

A week had passed. El had reported her missing to the police, of course. She had to be interviewed, and hadn't bothered to rehearse a lie. She said "no comment", like all the guilty people on true crime shows.

Her inbox was a mob of angry voices shouting about unfulfilled orders and unmet deadlines.

She felt the next day creeping. A vacuum. She didn't even know

what was on the other side this time, but she inhaled deeply, and stepped back in.

After the Peabody, CJ had travelled to Gabon, breaking through borders of silence to report on a conflict not troubling any algorithms.

Jeanie was watching her interview a group of refugees when the air began to crackle. A militia man on a motorbike - there and gone before anyone could think of diving for cover. The bullets scattered into press and refugees alike.

Jeanie gasped, hands to her stomach. She looked down, feeling hollow. Sometimes, she knew, people didn't feel it when they were seriously hurt. She moved her neck, limbs, she bent her body in a twisted test - am I dead? It didn't seem so.

Most were fleeing; survivors and wounded swarmed, helpless, directionless. Jeanie's shouts couldn't be heard, screaming for people to move out the way - she had to see - there on the floor -

CJ had a helmet, a bullet-proof vest - *but her neck*. There was a bullet

in her neck. Blood haloed around her.

Jeanie saw the life leave her own eyes. She watched her jaw go slack. In the chaos, she might have been the only person who saw it.

Something pulled at her, a deep wrongness which almost bodily dragged her back to the mirror's haze. This couldn't be. She couldn't be here, dead and alive.

She was dragged back - arms reaching out, desperate to hold the woman on the floor that she had watched for so many hours. That she loved like herself, but more

than herself. She screamed as the mirror's haze swallowed her.

Hurled out, she landed in her bedroom. She desperately manifested CJ in her thoughts, but the mirror remained defiantly sharp.

She stared at her hands. Small, unharmed, unscarred hands, the hands that never risked anything, and made only small things.

Jeanie, of course, couldn't explain her grief to El, or why she refused to get help.

‘If you don’t tell me what’s going on, there’s no chance for us,’ El had said. ‘This has been going on for so long. I can’t work it out, Jeanie.’

Jeanie looked at the floor.

When El kicked her out, it wasn’t the thought of losing her that sent Jeanie spiralling - it was the thought of life without the mirror. She’d been so focused on the next world that she hadn’t considered the possibility of being cut off from it.

Could she take it with her? The question came, then she laughed it

away. It was a full-length mirror,
after all.

She'd have to find a better life.

As an outsider, always.

And so, with nothing more than a
half-formed thought in her head,
Jeanie stepped into the mirror
without a plan for ever coming
back.

She'd taken herself to the attic of
miniatures at Rich-Jeanie's glass
mansion and let herself sink into
the comfort of it. Jeanie, avoiding
both RJ and her EI, spent time in
the tiny world under a big sky. The

Rio Cinema, the Curve Garden, Better Health Bakery. Miniature, intricate, perfect. She hadn't set foot in any of them in years.

It took months before she even set foot outside their attic. She followed the sounds of life heard from the kitchen. Anniversary day - theirs, not hers. RJ was making dim sum with flavour combinations she knew to be El's favourites, clearly planned to elicit a 'cor blimey'. She watched herself sit, thinking up funny names for the dishes, listing out all the words - a groan for *Steak a Bao*, a satisfied smile for *Shrimply the Best Siu Mai*.

I can do that, she thought. I can be that person too.

Jeanie had left the kitchen light on, hoping El would see her when she came back.

El emerged from the evening light. Behind the glass door, she stopped. She stood there, looking at Jeanie as if trying to see if she recognised any part of the woman sitting in her kitchen. Her expression - it wouldn't settle, and Jeanie couldn't place it. El didn't move.

Jeanie rose deliberately, opened the door, and there they were, facing each other in their very

small kitchen, in their very small house, in their world.

She barely let Jeanie say 'hello', before -

'I've just done your fucking eulogy.'

Time stopped; their eyes met. And in that shared moment, when Jeanie's snowflake-blue and El's forest-hazel eyes saw each other, and only each other, they laughed.

Jeanie's throat burned, the words scraping their way out. 'I hope it was good.'

'I called you a twat.'

'Sounds about fair.'

‘And you don’t even have the good grace to be dead.’

El’s smile was worn, but genuine.

‘But I have been, El,’ she said. ‘I really have.’

And that was when Jeanie broke. She shattered, like the mirror, which upstairs, lay in fragments on the bedroom carpet. She wept. El pulled her in, wrapping her arms around Jeanie: the only Jeanie she knew.